

Ballarat International Foto Biennale

ballaratfoto.org

23.8–19.10.25

BALLARAT INTERNATIONAL FOTO BIENNALE PRESENTS **ENNINFUL x MAPPLETHORPE**

23 AUGUST – 19 OCTOBER 2025

The extraordinary work and vision of one of the world's most revered photographers, Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), will be shown in a carefully considered exhibition curated by the highly celebrated Ghanaian-born British editor Edward Enninful OBE at the Ballarat International Foto Biennale, 23 August – 19 October 2025.



For **ENNINFUL X MAPPLETHORPE**, Enninful has presented his selection of 46 photographs in pairs, forging new dialogues between the images, inviting visitors to experience Mapplethorpe's best-known artworks with a fresh vision.

Robert Mapplethorpe was a master photographer whose work created tension between light and dark, celebrity and underground, sacred and profane, ripple and form.

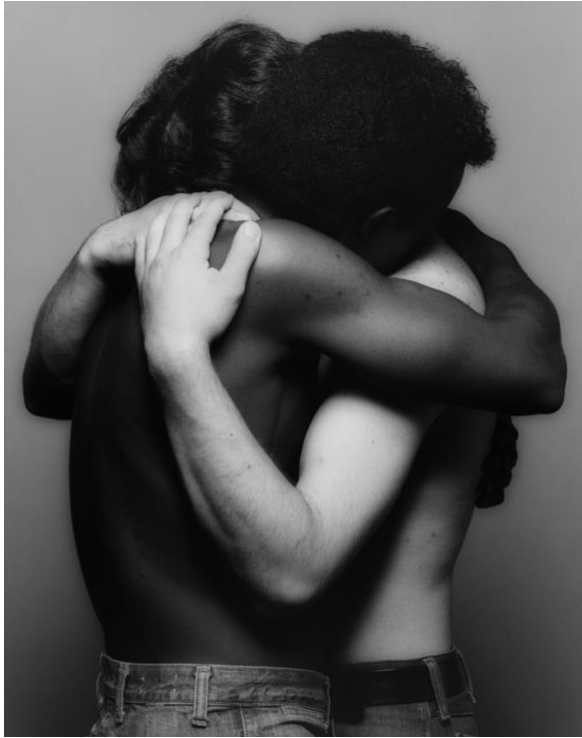
Born in Queens, New York, in 1946, Mapplethorpe studied graphic arts at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn before dropping out to become a portraitist, documentarian, and art and fashion photographer. He began by experimenting with Polaroid cameras, but by the mid-1970s had moved on to a medium format camera, a Hasselblad 500.

Mapplethorpe photographed in New York City at a time in the 1970s and 1980s, when creativity burgeoned across the city in magazines, media, nightclubs, artists, and performers, a time when the city was crawling out of a grungy decline into a new optimum, a new expression. It was the time of Warhol, The Ramones, Studio 54 - New York City was a cultural melting pot, a pressure cooker with crime, nightlife, a financial boom, and an AIDS epidemic on the horizon.

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Mapplethorpe photographed people he knew and those on the rise in music, film, art and creative pursuits. In ENNINFUL X MAPPLETHORPE there are familiar faces – Isabella Rossellini in saturated black and white; Grace Jones painted by Keith Haring, standing alert and open in a headdress with conical jewellery on her chest; a young Richard Gere; a serious silhouette of Karl Lagerfeld with Dovanna in one of his Paris haute couture dresses; and a curious iconic photograph of Princess Margaret with Reinaldo Herrera on the beach in Mustique, tanned with a gin bottle close by.

Vanessa Gerrans, CEO of the Ballarat International Foto Biennale said this exquisite exhibition was a major coup for Australia's largest photography festival.

“To see these prolific works by Mapplethorpe presented in curated pairs by Enninfu is a huge drawcard for the Biennale. This exhibition tells Mapplethorpe's story as well as drawing attention to his creative statements of using shadow to mark the features of an individual in his bold, unapologetic and iconoclastic style.”

“We are honoured to be celebrating the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and working alongside Edward Enninfu and the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to bring this must-see exhibition to Australia for the Ballarat International Foto Biennale,” said Vanessa.

Highlights of ENNINFUL X MAPPLETHORPE include a series of self-portraits taken by Mapplethorpe over a year and showing aspects of the parts of his character where he was self-confident: dressed like a bad boy redolent of James Dean or Marlon Brando, or wearing full makeup in a fur coat with his full painted lips front and centre.

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Mapplethorpe's now iconic photographs of rock n' roll musician, artist and poet Patti Smith show their symbiotic relationship in a series of seminal photographs, including the androgynous image of Patti wearing a white shirt, slim tie and jacket, tossed over one shoulder, that appeared on the cover of her *Horses* album in 1975, 50 years ago.

In his world of images, Mapplethorpe was provocative as he played with strength, fragility, and extremes – from a human face to a ripped muscular torso, fragile petals of flowers to the emerging

character of a child. He used light in a sculptural way, as he captured the lines of muscular bodies from female bodybuilder Lisa Lyon to Black men with defined abdomens and pumped biceps.



Mapplethorpe explored some extreme practices around 1974 as he began to document the denizens of S&M clubs in New York City. Challenging and, for some, offensive, several of the works sparked a heated debate about obscenity versus the exploration of human sexuality in art. By the 1980s, Mapplethorpe moved on from this focus and evolved his photographic practice by continuing to capture still lifes, flowers, portraits, and nudes.

Mapplethorpe died in 1989 at the age of 42 from complications of AIDS.

This exhibition is presented with the cooperation of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

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“On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, I express how pleased we are that Edward Enninful's unique and visionary approach to Mapplethorpe will now be part of the distinguished Ballarat International Foto Biennale. This exhibition achieved enormous praise both from critics and attendees when it was first installed in Paris, at the Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, in March of 2024. While Robert Mapplethorpe exhibitions have been presented in Sydney and Perth, we are particularly excited for his works to be presented at this important festival, showing the talent not only of the artist, but also the curator.” - Michael Ward Stout, President, Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.

ENNINFUL X MAPPLETHORPE is exclusive in Australia to the Ballarat International Foto Biennale. The exhibition will be on display at the Post Office Gallery, Ballarat and joins Campbell Addy on the line-up for the 11th edition of Australia's largest and highly celebrated photography festival.

Ballarat International Foto Biennale runs from 23 August – 19 October 2025.

Federation University Australia is the education partner of this exhibition.

For further information visit **ballaratfoto.org**

Images:

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1. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait*, 1980
2. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Embrace*, 1982
3. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Patti Smith*, 1975

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